

# LOCATIONS IN TELEVISION DRAMA SERIES: INTRODUCTION

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In this special issue, the guest editors will invite the reader to come with us to cosmopolitan cities such as Berlin, Los Angeles and Miami, and to more ambiguous urban landscapes such as Belfast and Baltimore. Moreover, we will guide you to the provincial, industrial city of Frederikshavn in the northern part of Denmark, and to Tilburg and the Brabant region in The Netherlands. Don't miss the touristic sites in Australia, namely the beaches in Sydney and at the Gold Coast, nor the rural, historical village Chilham, located in Kent in the UK. All these places have one thing in common: they play a significant part in one or several television drama series. On behalf of the crew of authors, editors and myself, I will welcome you on board, and I wish you a pleasant and eye-opening journey!

During the last decades, television drama series have become “prized” content and valuable sales for broadcasters, online platform providers and distributors, and the production value and the budgets for such series have increased (McCabe and Akass 2007, Nelson 2007, Lotz 2014, Steemers 2016). As part of this development, the aesthetic and narrative elements of television drama have changed, and we now see more complex narratives and characters as well as more scenic imagery and sophisticated visual aesthetics when it comes to settings, lighting, colours and production design (Mittell 2015, García 2016, Wheatley 2016). This tendency has opened up new ways of using and displaying the places that are featured in television series: there is greater use of location shooting, and a more significant handling of actual, geographical plac-

es - something that gives authenticity and visual values to the series. Location, a term that until recently has mainly been a practical term in television productions and television studies, has received new attention among producers, broadcasters, distributors, fans and audiences. Academics have picked up on the interests for locations and related them to theories such as cinematic landscapes, landscape painting, literary places, media geography, media consumption, media tourism and cult geographies (Hills 2002, Lefebvre 2006, Reijnders, 2011, Månsson 2015, Hansen and Waade 2017).

Popular television series and brands – such as *Game of Thrones*, *Sex and the City*, *Nordic Noir*, *The Fall*, *Cities* and *The Wire* – illustrate how location has become a significant production value. The places in which these series are set are sometimes reflected in the stories in significant ways, and in some cases the choice of locations has brought extra funding to the productions. The visual aesthetic and topography include panoramic views, cityscapes, snowscapes and seascapes. The televisual landscapes and panoramas are linked to new aesthetic (cinematic) standards for television drama series, new screen technologies (for example big, high definition television screens), and a general fascination and commodification of places and landscapes in global consumer cultures.

Following this process, locations and places have been reflected in film studies (for example film semiotics, national landscapes in film, film history) and literature studies for decades, but only very recently in television studies and television drama studies. Thus, locations, cinematic geography and landscapes in television drama series represent a fairly new and emerging research field. In general, locations, television places and production design have experienced very little academic attention in contrast to, for example, narratives, visual style, genre and acting. However, there are some exceptions throughout history, for example the studies of places and locations represented in the first American TV dramas of the fifties and the sixties (i.e. the westerns). It is obvious to draw upon the extensive scholarly work that already exists for cinema and literature, but we still need to develop television specific – as well as television drama specific – analyses and theories to be able to see how places play their role in television drama production, aesthetics and reception. For example, the seriality of television drama influences the relationship between viewers and the locations presented onscreen. Often we see that viewers develop a close and intimate relationship to the places themselves throughout the episodes and seasons of the drama series. In a slightly misleading formulation, some producers and scholars characterises this phenomenon as “location as

character”. But this overlooks substantial differences between characters, plot and setting in a drama series (for an elaborated discussion in this regards, see McNutt’s article in this issue).

Les Roberts (2012) introduces the idea of cinematic geography as an interdisciplinary approach that reflects upon the relation between the film or television drama series and the geographical place of the actual city, and demonstrates the complex interplay between the economic, artistic and practical interests that are at stake when it comes to audio-visual productions. Roberts’s work is a contribution to a more general and increasingly widespread interest in the relation between media and geography (Couldry and McCarthy 2004; Falkheimer and Jansson 2006; Hansen and Waade 2017). More recently, there are works on, for instance, *The Wire* (Gjelsvik 2010), BBC’s *Wallander* and the glocal (McCabe 2015) and landscapes in *Nordic Noir* (Creeber 2014). One of the contributions that exists on locations in television drama at this stage is the special issue on *Treme* and New Orleans as cases in the journal *Television and New Media* (Mayer 2012). Location in a television drama production involves persons and decisions both above the line (creative and financial decision makers) and below the line (technical and practical personal), as well as institutional and economic conditions outside the production team, for example funding, production facilities, public service commitments and target groups (Blandford and McElroy 2011). As part of the glocalisation process, specific places become commodities with significant values – both cultural and economic – in a globalised world. The recent interest in places in the creative industry in general (Comunian et al. 2010) and in television drama in particular illustrates this very well.

To better understand the aesthetic, cultural, political and economic aspects of cinematic landscapes in television drama, we need to develop perspectives across disciplines such as geography, art history, media and creative industries. This special issue is dedicated to meeting some of these needs, and to the analysis of the increasingly significant role of location as a key element in television drama.

## 1. LOCATION STUDIES

Location studies introduce a new and emerging approach within media studies based on the empirical analysis of locations in media texts, media production and media reception (Hallam and Roberts 2014; Moores 2012). Location studies are not limited to television drama series, but draw upon a

long tradition of analysing places and landscapes in film, art and literature. Moreover, the location studies approach is of great relevance when looking at locative social media technologies, in which locations play significant communicative, aesthetic and social roles (Goggin and Hjorth 2009, Gordon and de Souza 2011). Location studies reflect upon the relationship between places and media texts (in this case television drama series). It considers various aspects of those relationships, such as: the aesthetic and narrative aspects of places in television drama; how media represents and brands places (cities, nations, regions); how sites of production and their physical conditions influence particular series; and how media production is seen as a valuable creative industry and means of regional development to attract investors, inhabitants and visitors. Hallam and Roberts include a critical aspect to location studies, in which film, documentaries and television drama series can be considered as “spatial critique”, in the way that they critically reflect on, discuss and negotiate the infrastructure, architecture, social conditions and policies in actual places, cities, regions and landscapes.

Following Hallam and Roberts, together with Hansen, I have elsewhere suggested a model for location studies (Hansen and Waade, 2017) where the different aspects of on-screen features and off-screen factors relate in the handling of location and local colour in television drama (in this case with a particular focus on Nordic Noir series). The model can work as a framework for the articles presented in this special issue, in which different aspects of location on-screen and off-screen are emphasised. The on-screen features inform and influence the scene specific locations and the local colour of the television drama series, and include elements such as urban and rural places, climactic conditions, settings inland, coastal, and offshore, architecture, art and design, as well as infrastructure and mobility (for example cars, bicycles, walking, running, travelling by train, train stations, subways etc.). The off-screen factors furthermore inform and influence the scene-specific locations and the local colour of the television drama series, and include political and economic con-

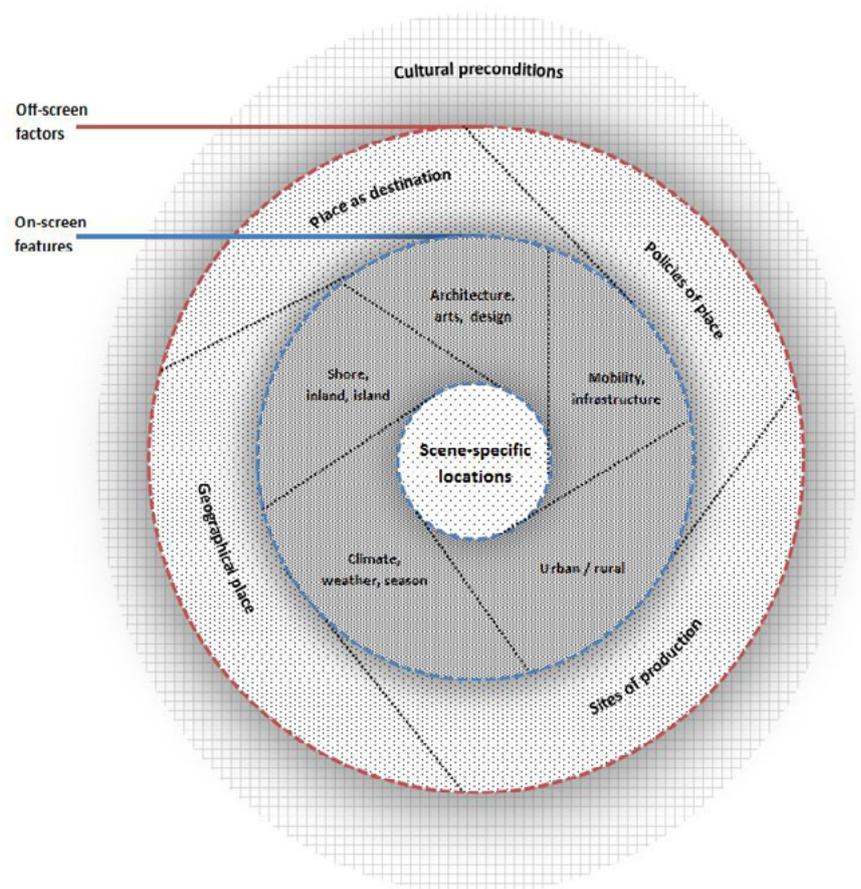


FIGURE 1. ON-SCREEN FACTORS AND OFF-SCREEN FEATURES OF LOCATIONS IN *NORDIC NOIR* (HANSEN AND WAADE 2017, CHAPTER 3).

ditions, the actual sites of production, the historical and geographical place, and the place as destination and branded content. Finally, the cultural preconditions in which the on-screen and off-screen are embedded also influence and inform the way places are chosen and presented in the television drama series. These could include, for example, the strong tradition of public service drama in some parts of the worlds, or places acknowledged and marked by war, conflicts and difficult heritage. It could also be locations acknowledged as picturesque sites, or touristic and commodified places meant for cultural consumption and well known from art works, posters, films and travel books.

In Kim Toft Hansen and Jørgen Riber Christensen’s article in this issue, the authors develop the location studies approach further and suggest four main aspects of location in television drama series, including its reception as: a) *setting* related to the diegetic world, b) *cinematic landscape* related

to the visual and scenic imageries, c) the *site of production*, and, finally, d) the *intertextual location* “which is a notion of locations as particular hinges between locations as settings and locations as sites of production tied to the reception of these by the audience” (Christensen and Hansen 2015).

## 2. FROM FREDERIKSHAVN AND THE GOLD COAST, TO BELFAST, BALTIMORE AND CHILHAM

The places, series and spatial approaches represented and analysed in the contributions to this special issue of *SERIES* connect with many aspects of the location studies approach outlined above. Furthermore, the cases illustrate different genres, different locations (rural/urban places, province/centres, etc.), and different countries (UK, Germany, Denmark, US). Moreover, some of the cases illustrate contested and negotiated places (Berlin, Belfast, Baltimore), some are touristic and heritage places (the Gold Coast, Chilham), some are highly mediated places (Miami, Los Angeles), and others represent outskirts and peripheral places (Tilburg, Frederikshavn). However, the majority of the cases represent crime series, and this has to do with the genre’s transnational popularity as well as its realism and often place-specific approach (for a further elaboration, see Alberto García’s article in this issue). Furthermore, all cases illustrate locations from Western countries.

Let us take a closer look at how the articles contribute to the location study approach. The three first articles in this issue take a production studies approach to location in television drama, focussing on the ways in which production conditions influence and inform the selection and display of places on the screen. Following the location studies model mentioned above, these articles emphasise off-screen conditions. Firstly, in their article *Norskov and the Logic of Place: The Soft Effect of Local Danish TV-drama Production*, Hansen and Christensen analyse the series *Norskov*, considering the role of the provincial, industrial city of Frederikshavn in the production, as well as the series’ story and imagery. Based on interviews with the series’ location manager, cinematographer, producer and scriptwriter, as well as textual analysis of the series itself, Hansen and Christensen’s article illustrates how *Norskov* is a result of “stories from below” embedded in local ideas and conditions. In this case, the use of location emphasises Frederikshavn as a province and industrial city, a shore and “port noir”, in which the local is connected to

global crime and market conditions. In their article *The Gold Coast on Screen: Children’s television selling Brand Australia in international markets*, Davis and Potter also take a production approach to location in television drama series, focusing on Australia’s beach as a source of popular imagery that attracts young viewers both within and outside Australia. The authors focus on the use of beaches at the Gold Coast and in Sydney, and – based on interviews with industry personnel – they discuss the market strategies and the cultural political considerations that lie behind the handling of these locations in four selected productions. In their article *Berlin in Television Drama Series: A Mediated Space*, Eichner and Mikos focus on Berlin as a historical, well-known film location and discuss the differences between Berlin as a film city and as a television city, and how media representations feed back into our understanding and imagination of Berlin as a contested place.

The following three articles emphasise on-screen features, and take a close look at how location is reflected in various series’ narrative, dramaturgic and aesthetic concepts and premises. Alberto García’s article *Baltimore in The Wire and Los Angeles in The Shield: Urban Landscapes in American Drama Series* uses the American television drama series as examples to focus on the “spatial turn” in television drama. García elaborates the relation between crime drama and spatial realism in this context, detailing how urban American landscapes play a significant role in the narrative and aesthetics of both series, as well as how each develops a sociopolitical critique of the cities themselves, which speak to the more general social, economic and racial injustices of contemporary American capitalism. Thus, both *The Wire* and *The Shield* give aesthetic form to a mode of spatial critique articulated by Hallam and Roberts (2016). In John Lynch’s article *Belfast in The Fall: Post-Conflict Geographies of Violence and Gender*, the television drama series is considered as part of Northern Ireland’s general ambition to “construct non-controversial images that speak of the new economic prosperity as part of a wider promotion of the region as a safe and prosperous place”. For both Lynch and García, these series relate to and reflect the cultural, historical and political pre-conditions of the cities, but whereas *The Wire* and *The Shield* articulate a socio-political critique of Baltimore and Los Angeles, *The Fall* aims to create a new story and image of Belfast as host to a regenerated post-conflict society. Both articles draw attention to the relation between on-screen features and cultural pre-conditions, and give examples of images, plots and characters that in different ways reflect the

general cultural, historical and political conditions of these cities. Finally, Myles McNutt's article *Narratives of Miami in Dexter and Burn Notice* takes as his starting point the well-worn notion of "place as character", and critically discusses how this idea is based on a misunderstanding of the role that locations play in contemporary television drama series. McNutt suggests that places can play different roles, either as *narrative backdrop* (the location is subordinated to the story) or *narrative engine* (the location plays a more salient role in the story's premise, plot, aesthetic, production and promotion). McNutt illustrates these ideas by analyzing the role of Miami as a narrative engine in the American drama series *Dexter*. He emphasizes the setting as both a crucial on-screen feature and a significant part of the series' promotion, and, thus, part of the off-screen factors in its success and reception.

The last two articles develop a further aspect to location studies, namely the audience. Sandra Wagemakers looks at the television viewers of the Dutch crime drama *Smeris*, and Lavinia Brydon and Lisa Stead look at a different audience, namely the host community of Chilham where a recent BBC adaptation of *Emma* was filmed. In *Tilburg in Smeris: Local Audiences Engaging with (Familiar) Locations on National Television*, Wagemakers elaborates the relationship between on-screen features and off-screen factors, in this case not in terms of the production, but rather of the audience. Based on empirical studies of viewers' Twitter feeds and Facebook comments, as well as focus group interviews and assessments, Wagemakers looks at how the audience experience and respond to the use of Tilburg as a location, and how locally shot television drama plays a role in the building of identity within regional areas that stand in peripheral relation to the Dutch capital. Brydon and Stead's article *The English Village in Emma: An Empirical Study of Heritage Dramas, Location Filming and Host Communities* – about the English village of Chilham as a rural filming location – is based on both oral history interviews with citizens and on community archive studies. The analysis reveals the strong relationship between the local population and the television drama series – it details the pleasures of being an on-set spectator, and how the frustrations of production as an imposition on the community are held in tension with more optimistic perspectives of television investment as a boost for local tourism. Both articles constitute significant methodological contributions to location studies, by looking at how audiences and host communities reflect on and relate to filming locations, and, thus, elaborate the intertextual locations.

### 3. RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

In general, the articles in this special issue on Locations in Television Drama contribute to the field of location studies in various and interesting ways. Firstly, on a methodological level, the articles represent research that engages with multi-disciplinary and multi-method approaches to location studies in television series. Secondly, on a theoretical and conceptual level, the articles theorise televisual places and their narrative, dramaturgical and aesthetic functions, as well as the relation between physical, mediated and imagined places. Thirdly, on a societal and political level, the analyses illustrate the role of regional commissioning and emerging collaborative practices, the politics of location as signifiers of changing landscapes in a globalised media culture, and how location can be considered as a site of screen tourism and community engagement.

For future work, it would be interesting to extend some of these perspectives and look at locations in television drama series across genres, across Western and non-Western media contexts, across different media and disciplines (discussing the similarities and differences between locations in film, theatre, literature and television drama), as well as across history (to see how the use of locations in television drama has developed throughout history).

On behalf of the authors and editors, I wish the reader a thought-provoking and fascinating reading experience. We hope it will inspire future research that further develops the application of location studies approaches to television, by looking across disciplines, history and geography.

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